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IL MAREMOTO, THE SEAQUAKE

by

Catherine Theis

B.A. University of Vermont, 1999,

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

December 2001

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Love Northbound / Southbound

Green grass or paler than grass?
A bittersweet reward,
agrodolce, how trains
will leave no signs, no stops,
perhaps just columned white,
shadow long. No loss of aion
along interstices
of crossing blades and dirt,
abreast a wall of gold,
angelic grottos fill
with blue light. The grass
is pale, unworn, the way
in words one hears absence
between the space of ties.

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At the Corner of Chestnut and Fourth

With right speech
(clear-voiced)
these leaves he will come
 bright as bronzefoil
 scattergoods at the corner
the flyaway with the sun glint of noon
crowning the most downbent humble
 passerby and passerby and by
the freshly knotted scarves of the young
 loud they know no better
when the white sheet dropped
 from the sky
 a windingsheet stretch of watery folds and gathers
from the breath of under
 covering the bent man
 and a word and his eyes oh his eyes before
they fell to the ground his eyes clouded
to grievous old age
leaf up the invisible windpipe and back down again
 scatterstill.
Dark undersky of sheet.
The coldcloud smoke and the hands
those poor birds sooty
 with blueblack topspin
 fly beyond the wind sweetly
rubbed together heat as thin as the still bronzefoil leaf.

Aci Castello, Sicily, 1985.

I have been walking to church for days now.
I listen to the bells ring, multiply the metal swings

backward forward to pigeons' flapping wings.
There you are, arc of a window pulling high your head,

in this magnificent house you tell me,
to live is a luxury. You are white, salt and lava rock,

you have been cleaning the atrium this morning,
steeped your hands over a pan of hot oil,

skimming burnt scraps of bread crumbs. I want to call
everyone to dinner. I want noise, clothes flying

from packed beach bags, turtle pacing in the courtyard,
beaten in the morning sun these rugs, whistle

of the granita man's truck, bright seawave, I want everyone
to see how beautiful you look. I line my crooked arm to your body

and when you touch me, you know to cover, leave tension on my skin,
that I might feel your push, your air, sparkling refrain of morning.

On Infection

She spent the summer mounting
dragonflies with her tongue,
pinned them hard and fast to the mesh
screens of the upstairs porch
stretched out like giant nets tasting of lead.
Reminding her of the slow moving
poison in her own blood. The men
in her mother's bedroom looked
on, ready to drown,
checking the little girl's pulse time
and time again until the leprosy
would finally blind her, sink her fluttering
heart deep in childhood sleep, swell her mouth
shut until tongue stopped
there and fierce goddess emerged.

Medusa's Story
(The Straight Stylus)

A shoelace of an unforgiving (you could say that) goddess
finds its way into
 Medusa's hair (fanning lover) a stranger
 in strands of brown.
And while her hair (safekeeping deceit) is pulled back
 up to the skies in a ponytail, no one can see
 the princely (lover / now / running) white snake
hidden (sidestepping grassy reeds) in the caves of her head
 for she swims out the knots
 skims the top of morning (it is rich)
 unbroken bending crooked
and smokes the ashwood spear.

Dido

They're finding flashlights in her bed sheets again.
How many times can one say careful?

Careful this queen is not. She climbs
electrical storms, her makeshift bandages

flapping white in the wind.
She breathes deep, warm ring

of air cinching her hips,
tying fast her surrender. Picture

this queen beside the waters,
frozen. The memory of lemons and jasmine,

she burns shipwood remembering summer's
furnace of perfume. "Heat is a property,

a possession." She eats caper berries
and rotting fish, picking scales, tiny flakes

of bedroom paint to color and shake
her spine. One fortune stretches out beyond

her collapsed window ledge; another remains.
She sees Carthage white with ash.

The Caper

Olive trees need constant trimming.
The girl is most useful climbing
branches, while the old man tends

to his orchard's roots.
It is Sicily, 1954, a coastal city.
One night, in the town's piazzetta,

(yes, there is even time for play here)
the girl sees a picture of the Chinese
countryside in a book. She remembers

only the persimmon tree and a cascade
of water. The old man promises
persimmons, if she harvests

what olive crop is left.
But, as you know, the sun is strong here.
It complicates what shadows there are.

Icy blue lips, hair up to the skies
in twisted roots. He keeps her
on a diet of olives and chicory.

Heels laced with arsenic, scratched
open by dustings of chert,
she runs like a plume of black smoke

as he empties sand from the creases
of her apron. Spills moving circles
around the bed, kisses her knucklebones.

She waits, sneaking soused anchovies to eat
tail by tail. Counts the empty cypress barrels.
It is here the girl uses a knife,

pays the old man in trade with bends
and stoops. Branches cut one fourth
diagonal from the stem.

Yes, may I have the tree delivered rooftop?
In the background: old man tells her,
“The woman’s body is valuable

because it has already been used.”
The tree gift comes today.
She climbs the house to clean the roof.

Pouches fennel tight
into small pockets under her arms.
Names the persimmon tree

water. Village children pick
almonds from storefront awnings.
The sun drops a white cord,

the persimmon tree burns arriving.
His groves border the sun’s edge.
So she is filled.

Orchards fill with empty buckets,
this girl walks with pointed
toes into the cactus flowers and roots.

She walks across the clear
expanse to where the angles meet.
Pacing *one one two* around Etna’s

collar of black glass. She weighs
herself down into the cracked
mountainside, touches cool,

faces porous edge.
Caretaker of the persimmon tree,
that cracking of brittle candy,

tiny fruit melting in her hands.
“What reward is left for those
run like black smoke?

The persimmon tree gave
no shade, even the woodcutter
knew this much about souls.

Knew the old man disguises
words that cannot be unwrapped.
His grace was no more

than the empty tangle
above my head. Branches cut.
But his orchards will grow.

My tree gift of persimmon?
only temporary, indeed.
Look, I see him now!

He’s replaced the roof tiles.
He’s found more hunger.
He cuts a cave through marble,

seashells of a city, fabled precision.
Entangled in the overhang of cloud,
wet seaweed, bitter greens

upon the sea’s salty lip of shore,
the women refill vinegar bottles
to keep their fast. Hands cupped,

funnel cracked and smelling yellow,
sacrificing olives, lemons, almonds,
anything from the dry earth,

relics once dangling beneath hot sun.
The women expand their bellies
with soured grape, pickle themselves

to exhaustion. Mourn for the roaming
souls who walk the earth's rivers,
and yes, there he sits, furrowing

his own space of little shade,
sun warming citizens to life,
open port call of morning."

Recently of Carver

It took Raymond Carver? I ask rubbing palm against his lower rib. A stop, a ridge that holds still until he breathes in, exhales, my fence of bone, moss covered, washed downstream through the pour. There is a drive back to Kentucky where there are horses and mailboxes my friends say, and no Raymond Carver. But I believe him and imagine that he flips the pages of "Alaska," forgets his pen on the drafting table. Plane lands, and you're in the middle of horse country. So easy, he's been here his whole life moving in and out of the shadows of steel mills. It really took Raymond Carver? I ask again. I hear a sigh and then him answering maybe no. Maybe no, I want to say, but Raymond Carver I say again. Which story do you think, if you had to choose? Let me just hear your voice. Deprived of sleep and meat, he speaks: I don't remember any stories now, you'll have to fall asleep without. Where are you going? I ask. To sleep, he says, and perhaps to Kentucky. You could just stay here, I say. I raise my arms above my head, push the sides way out. What in God's name are you doing now, he asks, slightly out of breath. I'm looking for my glasses, I say, and then maybe a good read. His arms, giant circles, flap the sheets once more. You gotta be Buddha about this, my sister says. Stop thinking of Kentucky. It's just not right, she clicks her tongue, at least not yet. And what makes--I can tell by the way he slouches, I say, the way he sleeps. There's more to sleeping, my sister says, and you should know. Besides how long did it take? How long? I ask and wait. It took Raymond Carver, I say. It took that long? It could work out, I say. Maybe, maybe, my sister warns, but just because you've never been to Kentucky doesn't mean you're fit to go.

The Aorist Tense

Consider Ginerva Bentivoglio,
wife of the ruler of Bologna (1462-1506).
Curious, but flip the front to the back

and her name flies and comes apart to
Ti voglio ben(e), a motherly *I love you*
very much wrapped hidden. To whom

is Ginerva sending this message?
Her husband? Her subjects?
Why has she so much love

to give? Clearly from her portrait
at the National Gallery of Art
in Washington, D.C., she is luminous.

Unfortunately, her beginning and end
are tangled up in renaissance, her loveliness
only derived from a lightness past time

quite frequently affords. Ginerva's love
not continue, it ends in portraiture.
Her quattrocento profile gives an imperial

likeness, still one would almost rather prefer
a three-quarter view than this shining coin.
For remember, here was a tyrant's wife,

her background that of stone
city walls, and yet, a patroness of the arts.
What treacherous acts would we view

from a flung shoulder, her right and slanted eye?
Ask Ginerva which artists she saved
from her husband's countdown.

Ask Ginerva how often she retired
into the palace's courtyard, bright
to the sun. As spectators we marvel

at things so that time may stand
with us a moment in our studying.
And had Ginerva asked, she would have said,

What laws do you keep from me
in the aftermath of lightning?
Marvel is the love of wisdom.

The Renaissance is talked about.
Ginerva's husband did no more than
to straighten his cuffs at such unboundedness.

Resident

402 isn't quite a love jail
yet I don't know when
they are planning--
perhaps they will move to another
before I have the chance
to check their hands for webbing.

Oddly enough, the residents at 402 both
come from solid love jails, 927 and 841--
one named after a president
the other after a lovely red hunting fox.

The trees outside 402 are trimmed
regularly by a team of cherry cutters.
The city provides such a service.
Unorthodox is what the neighbors call this
cramping and *tensione*,
which is not to say they don't enjoy a good chase--
limb-loosening and bright.

At Boethius' Villa, 1982

Drawn beneath wooden shutters
my sister and I weave hair ribbons

knotted to doorknobs
catch wind curling purple

vines to mosaics chipped in the floor
of this atrium we gather bundles

cracking silk leggy sprawl in this hollow
of paired lava rock

flip east to west our pet turtle pacing
a lookout between fountain and sea

blackened tips of fish teeth glued
in jagged rows to catch hair

in Boethius' story of a prison cell
we bind tiny lids to hold our sweat

cap our noonday heat
trace our courtyard's garden

pretend we are trapped
upon the wind's dry return

Il Maremoto, The Seaquake

*When he looked, the fisherman saw the spinblades
of a ship moving lost across the sea. Men came
with tunnels of music, a story from Vesuvius' rim.
The wife gave her tongue to grace.
All hide in the screen of sail.*

1.

Who or what washes up?
I say, friends, fashion your paper
hats to catch the rain, use your pocket

mirrors to keep yourselves in check,
follow the dented cargo
up and down the water's edge

as white as the sun's life cord,
to the one in need,
that heavenly torso we name ours.

2.

The unclean guests move sideways,
fasten the door, they think,
keep us close, where candles shine

vellum wrapped by an underwater
blue. I must extend their ship lines
from sail to hanging rope to shore.

Let my house funnel
their night sorrow. By untying
knots in napkins,

my wife calms the guests, asks
what more can I give?
and their swaying for a moment

stops: their fingers loosen
around this sinking night,
gift of a fire mountain.

3.
He must be a fisherman.
We can see the marks wrapped
red tight around his thumb-less fists.

We are the false stink
of almonds and sugar.
His wife rolls drops of spiced

meat off her hands, arranges leaves,
wax triangles of the lemon
tree. Burning paper ash smoke

straight to the eye of his octopus,
we kneel for dinner, and yes,
we eat ourselves to sleep.

4.
What would they say
if they saw my tongue left out
on the table, scarred and desiccated?

Skin of a snake crumpled
behind, its pointed tip of poison.
The chewing stops. I tell them:

to bury something is not easy,
but their unmoving faces
remind me of their own garden

in the sea. Today, these guests will watch
how my wife goes slow, spooning
dust as glasses fill with beads,

and remember the way
Timyche once moved
her arms. The hole in the earth

is the hole in her mouth
where a tongue used to rise
and fall, moving words.

She digs so that one may
be filled. So that all may be
returned complete.

5.
The hosts keep their front raked
of beach litter. They comb to catch
washings of music, the wind

comes and goes. Guests, let me
show you. The wind does not hide
his distaste in us: eating

until there is no hard edge,
no imagined white of limbered bone
to muscle pull. He sweeps the salt

of brittle moon, dried gut of water
buffalo, pheasant juice and ostrich
bill, to glut himself into a plug,

a hardened wall of all his fill.
I wait for wind to descend, slip
the curtain of his music

onto hooks, my outstretched limbs.
Here, at the fisherman's house,
his story of wind does not compare

to ours, we lurch in his telling--
the storm--ten men we have lost
to his wind music,

these stories crack free
the sweet fluid from our spines,
but the fisherman leaps over

the trenches we dig at noontime,
shows us the stretch
of island land, is kind.

6.
Their white sails crowd
the house, sagging the clothesline
down, a screen that moves

to hide my restlessness.
I circle walk the sea on clear,
rinse my boat at its salty lip.

I take three, four, eight baths tonight,
instructing my lover, "Strip."
Lover cries for the cotton

I promise. I throw berries and pine
needles, filling the marble
belly with spines of hardened sap,

seeds floating past tiles.
My hands sift the bog,
steam rising up past the mirror

for the last of her basket,
its crumbs expanding
to ripeness, balloons of earth

rolling toward white pumice shores.
Why do you come old fisherman?
Waiting--rising up from hardened heels,

you track powder, yellowing my house,
dust from floorboards counts
your years and a pile of wet towels

at your chair. Have you come
to bother me again, loosen my bedsheets
and keep me up till half past two?

Another morning lost.
Shall I boil water, find the salts
and cut the bindings

of your instructions?
These are the awkward seams
of your visits. The fisherman

walks to the flap
gush of sail, stepping back up
his slope of glass rock.

He loves the night as we do.
Do you love the night?
Love the circle swimming dark?

We rest our eyes
on his windowsill, our sails
in his corners, we must

move the water's edge farther
out, beyond the bandages
we wrap tightly here,

for they smell of old man,
charred and black, it is the shore
that moves and not the sea.

7.

These guests litter my house.
My wife sweeps herself out
the door, and down the face of heat.

She cannot tell me the bulb
of the sun curves her back.
It is the weight of a lost ship,

the folding of deckboards,
mottled by sun, bleached,
buckle ship to sea,

rubbling beachwash with foam.
What sea allows this much
unfolding? Fisherman,

ten men we lost when shoreline
receded to the incoming masthead,
when sea pulled back upon itself,

sideways, we cut Sinus Cumae
for Rectina, the upright,
pumiced by falling rock,

lover to Pliny the Elder.
Her body cast in stone
breathes sulfur and ash,

stays forgotten.
She did not think of light,
of earthquake shatter.

She spoke of spinblades:
I've raked all the helicopters
from my hair the ones *lusimeles*

and *amo* humming
straight to my eardrum
dislodged the copper wings

from my keyholes
so that you may catch
me better here in the light

when you come
fly sweetly
your breath watering roots.

8.
She's fashioning her house
by the water's edge, side door and all.
Rain ices night's mouth of open sky,

and before she spoke, there was sun.
She is in the habit of giving so much,
she cannot bear to look.

There's a line waiting at the sea's
edge, at the open window,
like the sun that hides in winter

clouds, a line of purity
she'd forgotten that makes sweet
her words, brings her to an open,

a clearing to move. A line
that lets her sleep constant
night replacing all she cannot see.

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS
COUNTY DEPARTMENT, DOMESTIC RELATIONS DIVISION

SPENDLOVE,

Petitioner,

and

No. 212 F _____

SPENDLOVE,

Respondent.

Joint Parenting Agreement

1. Joint Custody You remember King Solomon and his wisdom. Leave the body whole. If the child's body enacts the past, brushes too close to eardrum, instruct the child on reading love and spending. Again. Reading love and spending. Your eardrum will heal.

2. Joint Parenting Swingblade fairly to each other. Good cop, bad cop; take turns.

3. Joint Decisions Gutters often fill with leaves and need to be cleaned. In the fall, choose which leaves look best. Press colour to book, colour to wind.

4. Residential Parenting and Visitation Most mountain roads whiten. And sulfur rises, tickles the framework. In the breath of whiteness, find the child and dash long--out of the smoke.

5. Child's Activities The children will be smashed between lines of people eating drinking smoking singing jousts.

6. Transportation Marked cars and unmarked, telephoned and wireless.

This is how to reach an empty car in a parking lot, to know where they have gone and how long it will be before all is healed. An engine, a line of sound, a scream from the back seat. "Sit down, and put your seat belt back on, or else I'm pulling this car over to the side of the road and we're not going anywhere."

7. Telephone Communication Speak slowly, loudly and clearly, the magic triumvirate of who's who and where. Our job of knowing what silences you keep. The children, most often, tell us at what hours. They spend love just to spend. This is their reward for learning time. You do not need to wear a watch. Instead think of Cezanne's black clock, of time as a verbal event. You spend what you can. On the other hand, you record every gestures you spend, you cannot afford to lose a moment.

8. Basic Information Which house will you keep? and how will you tend it? Cleaning service at eight, overnight guests, unrestricted television? If planning a trip, advise when. Telephones, addresses, cars, pets, how do you spend your Saturdays?

9. Residency Do not flee the country, for we have your storm graphed and catalogued. We merely seek your cooperation for when the time comes. What a lovely new watch! Yes, we heard about your promotion, congratulations. His was once a blue house.

- a. For the pure of heart, there will never be enough money,
and your children will watch the scaffolding collapse.
Trained in evacuations and tornado seasons, they learned
roughhousing and will keep you safe.
- b. For the ambitious, there is never an honest living.
There is only your children sleeping through the storm of white.

10. Child's Records Property of spending love too fast too soon.

What Makes a Good Husband

All gentleman have tantrums.
This we know.
The difference between some

is great. Others, greater still.
For example, some gentleman pay
for the removal of dead skin,

or unwanted hair.
They meet to clip their nails,
buff lacquer clear their tips.

Wands now, icy columns of point,
their fingers direct.
Cutting and shaping business

ventures, episodes of love,
they decorate their lives.
Other gentlemen prefer less.

Appointment with masked
doctors to shave eighths
of digits, or release a foot

from rotating ankle.
“A lame man knows the sex act
best.” Their limp pace

sets these gentleman apart.
Walking behind, they take
notice of all that moves.

At the Royal Cambodian Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Most of her photographs isolate
the city of Phnom Penh in a square
light, with his Excellency Roland Eng,
lead motorcar, and bright hat.
There are women, thin in dress,
the kind whose legs kick out
from under them, purple
banners and outstretched palms.
Quick with his arms,
his Excellency flutters.

Some photographs are not as fortunate.
My mother kernels the good ones,
piece by piece she solutions the bronze
apsaras worth saving, as if retrieving plums
from tightly baked cakes, a fetish
of distinction she creates
from this process of selection,
government-strong and clocked.
On the other half divide, at home,
my mother sieves the loose
out of her camera, flakes of pigment,
our capacity to word from photographs,
either divine a story of missing parts, or slang
it out, keeps my mother's back bent in rough
equation, a sometimes of worth.

Exhibition

Cast: Maurizio Belfiore, visual artist; Bettina Sapenzia, art agent; Chiara Paganelli, writer; Ferran Adria, chef; Malone Fahey, bicyclist; Miguel Stretto, fashion designer

Time: December 2001

Place: Roma

Objective: These six artists must run down their art. And how they chase through the streets of Roma for the upturned--the shock-white of it. Wind is their arrow. These artists use their arms to fiercely aggrandir what others have stopped. In creating some beauty that is difficult. (Sideways one can always *hold* beauty.)

Maurizio, being the ringleader (but would never call himself such) does a fair amount of complaining and light searching. He keeps no bed, no lovers, but a studio for his agent Bettina and his writer friend Chiara. There is no time for love, only collection.

Ferran will not have Chiara. Malone and Miguel haven't made love in 27 months.

Exhibitions and revisions and boxing take most of the day, the prickles and the cactus fruit. Their art is what you would call livesaving, errors and all.

**The Alkaline of Maurizio Belfiore's New Exhibit,
(Padovian Artist and Free-Lance Thief)**

- Maurizio: Phenomenon dictates that we must steal,
pirate anything we can get our hands on.
Have you forgotten about la bicicletta?
or the icicle? Cut the cartilage out, see what rots.
- Bettina: We've pumiced the borders, sanded everything
down, nothing is left, (*throws a nail file across
the ocean of studio*) all that triggers
has been sharked, even the gypsies are without.
We palm only holes, ladle--tin to tin--rust
from pans and snuffboxes, all that glows a hoax.
- Maurizio: How can that be? (*cough*) I could see
when I got dressed this morning. Look!
I'm wearing coordinates. Our light is fine.
- Bettina: There is more to light than dressing . . . and you call
yourself the Bicycle Thief. Stick your head
to windowpane: Glass films an empty scene.
- Maurizio: Lusimeles, my darling, no scene is completely
empty. While you and your men chew,
the curtains will open / close.
Please, find an iceberg, record how it melts.
Volt a condemned pedicator, I don't care.
"At noontime when the earth is bright with flaming
heat," the exhibit must freeze. Those seven critics must sing.
- Bettina: Don't you think I know? My shoulder blades
crack with such weight. Three critics I took to lunch
and sucked my marrow clean.
- Maurizio: Did you save your bones?
- Bettina: Don't even think about displays!

Maurizio: Osso Buco! What could be better than a little veal shank?

Bettina: You kalamos, you prick, you unfashioned reed,
beautiful words are already your life's
ache, your inner chimney cold.

Maurizio: Vulgarity is a player. It is the lemon that sours
your bones for my exhibit, vinegars the peoples'
hearts, and makes them steal for art.

Bettina: Duct tape your agent, your dealer,
your head to the museum wall.

Maurizio: Hook the night is all I ask.
Belly the sun for what it's worth.
Tentacle all the hydroencephali . . .

At Attention

From the start, I worked with artists who never spoke. I often told them, "Speechless complainer, I will learn thy thought." Then came Maurizio Belfiore. From the wrist of every backbiter trails a ribbon: learn not to follow such cords for your eyes will roll downward constant, body stoops on body's curve. Needless to say, my posture is horrible, and my eyesight growing worse. Why do I bend backbone? These days, I can't tell three critics from seven, much less the thievery that goes on in the circle of Belfiore. There is laughter at the edge of lunchtime, but I'm too busy shaping parts to an assembled whole. What's worse, now Bettina is involved with their lot. Belfiore has her convinced that she can fence the sound of coolness. Oh bell of night! nightshade weaving purple stars through chain link, what am I to do? I measure 2 cm. 3 cm. 4 cm. faultlines with no reward. Belfiore's violence is of the Jesuit kind: spine shingling. He rings me up and wrings me out. "As you were," he commands. "As you are," I say back.

Shop Talk

Maurizio: I don't know, does this table look level?

Bettina: I don't know, why don't you use a level?

Maurizio: I think I have a level in my toolbox.

Bettina: Does that mean you want me to go to the toolbox and get a level?

Maurizio: I don't know, does this table look level?

(Repeat ad infinitum)

The Bell Tower

Maurizio: Are you choking on sour?

Chiara: (*gasps*) Where are spring's artichokes?

Maurizio: Artichokes are too clever, liable
to split a moment. Haven't you ever heard
of the deadly choke hold
of an artichoke? Jambone and melted
raclette is better for you.
I see Ferran's cooking lessons are of no help.

Chiara: But you know I'm vegetarian, M,
and I can't see the ham, the light in here's no good.

Maurizio: The light in here is perfect!
I just had the studio redone.

Chiara: As you say. Let's get down to things,
I need a find.

Maurizio: Same rules?

Chiara: Yes, same rules, though this time,
it will be: "Coolness--the sound
of the bell as it leaves the bell."

Maurizio: Ah, and the camus bulb
has been planted in the bracken!
Why so little room for maneuver?

Chiara: (*fork--dropping for a ring*)
Do you want the money or not?

Maurizio: Artist, detective, thief, gravedigger . . .
can't one complain of conditions?

Chiara: Bettina said.

Maurizio: Said *what*. What did she say? Said
there is nothing left we can use?
She's lying, she's jealous.

Chiara: There is a coolness, an icy bell of night
which I would like to find
and fence off with warning and danger signs,
my own abandoned mining shaft . . .
when can I have it, my new book?

Maurizio: Caves and tunnels are dangerous;
why can't you stay above ground
and work with Light and air for once?
My next show, for instance, will be
a collapsible city of tents: a lighthouse,
a jail, a factory, an apartment house,
a church of parachute nylon shaped
and pulled taut by invisible fishing lines . . .

Chiara: We're not talking about you *or* your
Cities, we're talking about . . .

Maurizio: Your danger! your rough-housing, yes, yes,
I know, but these tents will be white
so that the sun may warm them,
they will be lined . . .

In the Middle of That Bridge

The windmill's blades circle
slice wind, but as she has her hands full
just crossing that bridge of railroad,
she doesn't notice how fast the blades take sky.

Toc.

Toc.

Toc.

Crossing with Maurizio lasts,
and that anger moves, toc, wooden divide
and all. Toc. Cross. Toc. When her hands seize
up, fanning his face, toc, toc, toc, you know
they could stay crossing in the middle
of that bridge crossing at each other.

The Cooking Lesson: Dovetails

- Ferran: What do you expect from me, a crunch?
Let the essence melt, unroll the pour
out from the spout, I say, crack the bones
and let the life fluid drain.
- Chiara: But a croquette is supposed to be
crisp to the tongue, all shatters and flakes.
- Ferran: Who says so? Between tongue and taste
the remembered crisp can become
something entirely different. The famous
croquette booth on the corner either agrees
with your memory or it does not.
- Chiara: But memory is . . .
- Ferran: . . . and isn't, a backward glance;
(*shakes a pot*) try this:
(*extends a dovetail*)
this is a memory of church, two bites,
quickly now.
- Chiara: (*chewing and swallowing*) Like song and air,
breath mixed with cognac and candy, heat
of sitting-close sardines on wooden pew . . . odd,
isn't it? I've never been to church,
not even as a child, but I feel the carved
wood beneath my fingertips,
ornamental, the voices
rising and falling . . . bells . . .
- Ferran: Consider the tongue as ahistorical,
with memories that can be created,
mixed, salted and stored.
Shadow parts together . . . from plankton
to fruit in no time.

Chiara: In Cuba, I lived long the street from
a croquette booth . . .

Ferran: . . . so go again TODAY and order new;
I don't understand why you wouldn't
want a croquette . . .

Chiara: . . . fresh and salty.
In Cuba it never rained like that.

The Eutrophic Lakes of Ferran Adria Somewhere Near Tivoli

There is a bracelet of scent
 I want to give to you,
of onionskin, translucent
 green, and confetti rain,
would you wear the air
 as I gift it?
Rinse your elbows with the breezy
 contents of an envelope?
Down the corridors
 of your body, I glide,
despite the rope-root sedge
 and green-keeled cottongrass
you harvest in your crooks.
 How many times have I told you
that a well nourished lake soon
 becomes a meadow,
our swimming gone?
 More is more, and you will not
have it any other way.
 I am impermanent to you,
prefer to bicycle
 when storms are close
at hand. I'd rather have tea
 with the Kaiser and his lot--
consommé and chocolate,
 rosemary and pancetta--
you'd rather pack suitcases,
 this much I understand.
But what of the air you breathe
 and how will you travel,
make your way to the station
 that smells of licorice
and saltwater, nougat of seaweed
 bright fisted to the sky?
No wonder the bell
 of night is not to be found.

Armor

Malone: Dug a breast lid out from the bed once.

Miguel: Which one?

Malone: Blond colour, with roses.

Miguel: Yes, the roses were pink once. And your bike?

Malone: Say it's cracked, the roll of a procession stopped.
If broken, foil of sound. Anyhow, do you know
how to hitch?

Miguel: Hitch? No, there's always been more water
in my lungs than air. (*He swims.*) The counting one
by one, the pause, the breath. I say, to scrape one's knees
is hard work.

Malone: Some delight in hitching words by beat and dig.

Miguel: Will there be long shade?

Malone: Of course, and a return through ash and silt,
a chewy song. Think of it, shores with fish and candied
fruit, a place catalogued by men and flashing swords.

Miguel: And what of our bed? Once a parade of bedsheets . . .
(*sottovoce*) now, a place so lost.

Malone: Miguel, march down with me.

Miguel: For a city of hitch?

Malone: Yes, pedal with me, pedal and sound to the broken.

La Bottega di Miguel
A Staircase Above Piazza di Spagna

Coco Chanel says if there is no woman,
there is no dress. Perfume readies the air,

quick with the benzye acetate, a coal tar
derivative . . . smells like jasmine, or the number 5

train coming in. We're ripping jersey knits,
pulse points spotlighted and casual.

Would you care to dress with us,
our slouches posed against the bending

trees of twilight? Jaywalk across
these cuttings, sash-down the flounce

of evening, ribbed with columns of jasmine
white, the heat, our drowsiness singed

with finger touches. Delight holds us.
There, I've said it, *hello Malone*.

'Course, this side of the shop gets the brunt
of the sun, cooks the bricks to foundation.

I can see that you are hot. Off
of that bicycle, Malone,

you click like a tap-dancing man
in a top hat. What's more, your spokes

are dangerously close, scissoring away
our fabric on the floor. Why are you covered

so in wool sweaters and loose collars?
An icy wind in the fish market is no excuse.

Your body's line is a natural property,
yours and yours only. Use it well.

We could drape you as a Cairo businessman
to prevent you from riding that damn bicycle,

or outfit you as a parachute diver
who gently walks through the nylon waves . . .

Did I tell you I saw Maurizio today?
He wants back that other bike he loaned you.

Didn't say, though I know an opening is soon
at hand. Bettina said. To be staged in that windy

fish market, quite suited for Maurizio's temper,
and I'm to do the trimmings from mattress fiber

to onionskin, my "hands", will sew
glass panels and eyeshades, audience props.

Maurizio wants reeds and water,
a shoreline to the market's fish bins,

always I've wanted to storm, wrap
a watery meadow.

Chiesa di Santa Maria, In the Shade

He takes out his elbows every night.
We breathe into each other mouths
 like two spent boxers, collapsing
under the blows
 of one attack, or another. . . like tramps rolling
through the railway station, blind to the upright
around us.
Lungs washed out by this exercise,
 this joy of up.
Lately, he even refuses to sew
 the torn bedsheets
if our crossing does that much,
but, yet, he enjoys this fighting,
 practices chokeholds,
 beats up the waters of talk,
 drops the famous inbetween us.
He hides my bicycle,
rings Maurizio for drinks,
 and still I ask for his.
In bed, I pray for the heat
on his forearm to shove off.
 I pray for singular things,
over real and imagined bells:
a coolness.

At the Marketplace Reception In Honor of the Final Exhibition

The drowned man receiving.
And what for my time?
And what for my time?
Una stretta al cuore.
So the sadness does come again,
one's back against the drywall.
But the drinks are poured out,
and conversation kind.
Who remembers where they've been
the night before? Not the watery man.
Not the flyaway. In the morning,
some might find gristle
in their teeth, or a stain on their cuff,
but not the invited.

Final Notes at Maurizio Belfiore's Exhibition

To bring an idea up to the sky as if recollecting it.
Always underfoot, in my way, the space beneath
my feet must be cleared. We cannot afford the bad press.
Our lines must be straight--critics often just catch
these winds once, then ostrich-like they sleep.
Recall that I once asked for this presentation of reeds.
Recall that I once felt for wind to slipcover my eyes
to white cloud, now whisked clean of waterlost,
each one of us a fever that skates around the blurred
perimeter. But will we be light? Fall into the loveliness,
let me save the things of worth, remember,
growth is a place made quickly.
Understand I might give up reason for sequence.
Why sometimes is not worth asking.
Which is to say nothing worth the trouble
of remembering. To bring an idea up to the sky.
Anamnesis: collection of wind parts.

The Phainetai (He Seems to Me) Fragment

*He strikes me as godlike
who up close before you
sits and intent upon your sweet
voice listens to the bay of Naples
full of tears of smoke
and passengers
from a journey starting here
the imagination a line
that slowly moves
between the blackened temples
towers
uneven rise
on unsure footing I go
following
crusted edge
to the sea
I was there once within
spear's throw
dangling
from this buckled loop
close to love
stepping in from the height
of a tower
O vision
but not a sound from their lips
I heard and in my ears not a single word,
and as your charm fills his eyes
with longing, yes, it
makes the heart in my lungs shake;
for when I look at you, no
longer thereupon
am I able to speak,
a breastwork opens
an aching spirit
beyond the crossblades
of passion sings*

a seat soaked in wine
 the wishbone cracking arc
 of man's life
the green grass growing paler
 without speech
 listening
*but now my tongue is rent, subtle
flame races gently over skin,
and in my eyes no sight; there is
a ringing in my ears, for it is planted
and fastened*
 we are told
not in organs of the thorax
and abdomen
but folded inside
 the oil marrow
 the breath-soul refrains
a voice thrown
with trumpets and timpani, *and down me
the sweat ran, and a trembling
wholly overtook me, paler than grass
I was, and I am dead just short of that
it seems to me, it is,*
is this the cold sweat
that holds
 and shakes after living
love? Still gold bracelets
for my youth and sweet voice
before death's winding sheet
 first hung
 Pindar's bar across the eyes
to crust with a salt cloak
a seeming that cannot mean end.

Notes

Dido. “Heat is a property, a possession.” Gaston Bachelard. *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*.

What Makes a Good Husband. The ancient poet Mimnermos is recorded to have said, “The lame man knows the sex act best.”

The Alkaline of Maurizio Belfiore’s New Exhibit. “At noontime / when the earth is / with flaming / heat,” is from Sappho.

At Attention. “Speechless complainer, I will learn thy thought.” William Shakespeare. *Titus Andronicus*.

The Bell Tower. “Coolness--the sound of the bell as it leaves the bell.” Basho.

The Phainetai (He Seems to Me) Fragment. The italicized lines are a translation of Sappho’s fragment no. 31 by Michael D. Feagler.